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### **[Review of] H. Schwarz, Vying for Truth: Theology and the Natural Sciences from the 17th Century to the Present**

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**Hans Schwarz**

***Vying for Truth – Theology and the Natural Sciences from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present***

Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014. 236 pp. pb. £? ISBN 978-3-525-54028-2

The modern dialogue of science and theology in the Anglophone world has been significantly shaped, at least until recently, by the agenda set out by Ian Barbour in his seminal writings from the 1960s onwards. But as we are increasingly becoming aware, that dialogue has also been carried out in a variety of other contexts, which have been subject to different shaping influences. This book is to be welcomed not least for the way in which it alerts English-speaking readers to this wider context, and specifically to some of those thinkers who have addressed the relationships between science and theology in the German-speaking world.

Hans Schwarz is Professor of Systematic Theology and Contemporary Theological Issues at the Institute of Protestant Theology at the University of Regensburg. (That complex title itself alerts us to one aspect of the different context in which the dialogue of science and theology is carried out in Germany, since there, as Schwarz puts it, ‘professorships ... are more traditional in focus than in Anglo-Saxon countries where professorships are reoriented much more quickly toward present day issues’ (172).) He has engaged with the natural sciences in the past, notably in his book ‘Creation’ (2002), and he writes in the conviction that science and theology are both ‘indispensable to the human enterprise’ (11).

In the present book, Schwarz charts a story that will be familiar to readers of this journal. He sees theology as having been in retreat in the nineteenth century, reacting inadequately to the challenges of materialism and evolution (there is some especially interesting material here on German theologians of that period). Separate chapters deal with the rise of British Empiricism, the peculiarly North American response to Darwinism, and the ‘Fortress mentality’ of early twentieth-century Continental theology following in the wake of

Karl Barth's categorical rejection of 'any contact or dialogue with the natural sciences in his Doctrine of Creation' (87). The final chapters deal with Barbour and his successors, theological and scientific, in the contemporary 'dialogue with many voices'.

Schwarz casts a very wide net in addressing this dialogue, encompassing myriad authors from a rich variety of academic disciplines. Some of the names he cites are familiar in contemporary Anglophone science and religion circles (Peacocke, Polkinghorne, McGrath, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Murphy, Clayton, Hefner), others less so (Heim, Benk, Dürr). He also engages with those voices which reject any kind of rapprochement between science and theology (Dawkins, Wuketits, Kutschera) as well as advocates of 'Intelligent Design' (Johnson, Dembski, Scherer). This panoramic overview means that Schwarz's book serves as an excellent 'primer' in introducing readers to the thinking of these and many other thinkers. Moreover, Schwarz's approach covers not only individuals but also various institutions which have channelled their voices (the European Society for the Study of Science and Theology, the International Society for Science and Religion, the Ian Ramsey Centre at Oxford, the Research Institute of the Protestant Study Community at Heidelberg, the Religion and Science Network Germany – and, indeed, the Victoria Institute).

The main problem with Schwarz's approach is that in addressing so broad a range of writings on science and religion there is (perhaps inevitably) a sacrificing of depth to breadth. This may be seen in two characteristics of this book. First, whilst what scholars have said is (by and large) admirably summarised, there is little critical engagement with them. The reader is left with no indication of the relative status of the writings of (say) Dawkins, Dembski and Deane-Drummond in scholarly circles. Second, the opening historical chapters have a rather outdated feel: although Schwarz mentions the names of historians such as J. H. Brooke and Peter Harrison in passing (although one of the index entries on the former is in fact a reference to Oxford Brookes University), there is no engagement with the fresh light

which thinkers like these have brought to the historical study of the relationships between science and theology – or with the accompanying awareness that perhaps the stories which have been told about those relationships require a fresh, more critical reading. Inevitably, too, when dealing with a lively academic discipline, which is being continuously shaped and re-shaped by the ongoing activities of many individuals and institutions, it is impossible to be fully up-to-date with recent developments; but this is of course a problem faced by any author attempting a survey of this kind.

Schwarz's English (or that of his translator) may occasionally be a little eccentric, but that should in no way discourage anyone from engaging with this wide-ranging book which, in addition to offering a dependable guide through a great deal of contemporary literature, does much to broaden out the context of the science-theology dialogue for English-language readers.

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